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**Over 200 Professionals in Fire, Juvenile Justice, Social Service and Mental Health  
Attend Conference on Juvenile Firesetting During Arson Awareness Week**

WORCESTER, MA - On May 9, 2008, over 200 professionals and agencies from across New England and New York met to learn more about the juvenile firesetting issue and to collaborate on how to address it. The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual *Northeast Juvenile Firesetting Conference: Pathways to Collaboration & Intervention* was jointly sponsored by the state Department of Fire Services, the Mass. Property Insurance Underwriting Association, the Massachusetts Association of Safety and Fire Educators (MA SAFE) and the Brandon School of Natick, MA.

**Arson Awareness Week**

It is fitting that this conference is being held during this year's Arson Awareness Week (May 4-10, 2008) because the U.S. Fire Administration's theme is "Toy like Lighters – Playing with Fire" The goal is to focus public attention on the dangers of toy like or novelty lighters in the hands of children. "A child playing with any type of lighter is a major concern," said State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan. "Adults must take responsibility for keeping all lighters and matches out of children's hands."

**Worcester District Attorney Joseph Early Jr. on Juvenile Justice's Role**

"The juvenile justice system can intervene in the lives of fire-setting youths," said Worcester District Attorney Joseph D. Early, Jr. "We want to make sure they get the help they need, but we will hold youthful offenders accountable for their actions. My office priority is always public safety."

**Dr. Jeffrey Geller Delivered Keynote Address**

Dr. Jeffrey Geller Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts Medical School delivered the keynote address and spoke on his academic studies of fire setters. Professor Geller said, "While the media is all too quick to label a frequent firesetter a 'pyromaniac', most firesetters who set fires for other than criminal reasons do so because

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they lack the skills to communicate in more socially acceptable forms. The untold, painful, and sometimes lethal consequences of fires are more often than not the unintended consequences of an act by someone whose judgment is impaired – either acutely by alcohol, for example, or chronically by significant learning disabilities, for example.”

### **Juvenile Firesetting Is Public Safety Threat Without Proper Response**

State Fire Marshal, Stephen Coan, speaking during the luncheon said, “Juvenile firesetting is a serious public safety threat without the proper response. In the past five years there have been nearly one thousand fires started by juveniles causing 53 civilian injuries, 40 firefighter injuries and \$9.5 million in damages.” He added, “Just last month, two Holyoke children died and another was injured when small children were playing with lighters in a bedroom.”

### **Conference Fosters Multi-Agency Collaboration**

This conference provided a unique opportunity for mental health, fire services, burn care, schools, social service and juvenile justice professionals to receive the most up-to-date information and best practice models for multi-disciplinary collaboration in responding to problem firesetting behavior. Attendees spent the day hearing from keynote speakers and participating in workshops that focused on various aspects of this national public safety issue.

Timothy M. Callahan, Executive Director of the Brandon School said of the conference, “It’s critical to have all the agencies that need to work on the serious problem of juvenile firesetting come together.” He added, “I want to applaud the dedication of the leaders and representatives from fire services, the district attorney’s office, state police, social services, youth services, mental health, public schools, burn care and the state’s early education agency that work together to address this critical issue.”

### **Workshops**

The main objective of the conference was to bring together all of the different disciplines involved in preventing, responding to, and treating juvenile firesetting behaviors. One of the highlights of the conference was an expert panel discussion on community-based intervention networks featuring Paul Schwartzman of Fairport Counseling in New York, Marion Doctor of Children's Hospital in Colorado, Don Porth of SOS Fires Intervention in Oregon and MA State Police Sgt. Paul Zipper, Ph.D.

There were eight workshops presented at the conference:

*Is She Cinderella or Medusa? Adolescent Female Firesetting*

*Taking a Firesetting History from a Clinical Perspective*

*Puppets, Tools & Toys: Fire Education for Latency Youth*

*Identifying, Examining & Responding to Juvenile Bomb-makers*

*Bullies, Victims, Firesetting & JFSI Programs as Community Activist*

*Pulling Rabbits Out of Hats: Complex Cases and Creative Interventions*

*The Firesetting Intervention Triangle*

*How the Courts Can Help*

Presenters included:

Jessica Gotthold, Sr. Special Agent, CFI, CES, federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives;  
Paul Schwartzman, MS, LMHC, DAPA, Fairport Counseling, NY;  
Marion Doctor, LCSW, The Children's Hospital, Denver, CO;  
Don Porth, SOS Fires Intervention Programs, Damascus, OR;  
David Wilcox, Middlesex Juvenile Court Clinic;  
Teresa M. Plante, M.S., Probation Officer, Norfolk Juvenile Probation Department;  
Tom Malone, Regional Counsel with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services;  
Sgt. Paul Zipper, Ph.D., Mass. State Police in the Office of the State Fire Marshal;  
Robert Stadolnik, Ed.D, FirePsych, Inc. and Brandon School;  
Theresa Manela, LICSW, FirePsych, Inc;  
Victor Zamaloff, CFI, JFSIS, Operations K.I.D.S., Poughkeepsie, NY;  
Liz Maestranzi, LCSW, Assistant Coordinator of Case Management, Brandon School;  
and representatives from the Office of Worcester District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr.,  
and the Office of Norfolk District Attorney William R. Keating.

For information on juvenile firesetting, visit the state Department of Fire Services website at [www.mass.gov.dfs](http://www.mass.gov.dfs). For more information about the conference please visit [www.brandonschool.org](http://www.brandonschool.org).

**About state Department of Fires Services (DFS):**

The State Fire Marshal heads the Department of Fire Services, the sole agency within state government responsible for overall coordination of fire service policy and operations. Specially trained State Police are assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal to conduct fire and explosion investigations. The mission of the Department of Fire Services is to provide the people of Massachusetts the ability to create safer communities through coordinated training, education, prevention, investigation, emergency response and leadership.

**About Brandon School:**

Since 1966, Brandon School and Residential Treatment Center, Inc. in Natick, MA has been providing services for troubled boys and their families. In addition to treatment and educational programs for a broad range of behavioral and emotional disorders, Brandon operates a specialized program for the intensive treatment of boys with firesetting behaviors and has recently pioneered a short-term residential assessment service, called a Rapid Firesetting Assessment, the only one of its kind in the country.